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would urge, which ought not to be entertained, to an undue extent, to the prejudice of so important an undertaking. One great mistake should not be thought enough to prove an utterly incompetent man, and Commodore Jones has meritoriously served his country in other times, when it was in a condition to owe much to the services of a brave and skilful sailor. Since it seems, in this business, it is a determined thing, that he shall have his country's honor in his keeping, we hold it to be the duty of every good citizen, to hope the best from his management. Perhaps he cannot reasonably expect, that any future questionable conduct will be viewed with the same indulgence, as if he had not already rendered himself so seriously obnoxious to complaint. But, on the other hand, he could desire no nobler opportunity than he possesses, for reinstating himself in the public favor so unhappily put at hazard.

To return for a moment to the first of the works under review, — the author of the “History of Circumnavigation” promises us, in his preface, a Continuation, which shall contain accounts of all the voyages of importance since the days of Cook; accompanied by a map comprising the latest discoveries and surveys. For this publication we shall look with considerable interest. The original histories of the modern French and German voyages, are usually too expensive to be generally known, except by abridgments; and the map, if well executed, will be of especial value, as a means of estimating the additions to it, anticipated from our own expedition.

ART. VI. — *Letters of Lucius M. Piso, from Palmyra, to his Friend, Marcus Curtius, at Rome. Now first translated and published.* New York: C. S. Francis. Boston: J. H. Francis. 1837. 2 vols. 12mo.

THIS work has appeared since the publication of our last number, and seems to be rapidly gaining the reputation which it so well deserves. It is an historical romance. Piso, the imagined author of the Letters, is supposed to have visited Palmyra, toward the close of the third century, to have become acquainted with Zenobia and her court, to have seen the

city in its glory, and to have witnessed its destruction by Aurelian, (A. D. 273.)

The scene, the characters, and the historical events are finely selected ; for they abound with striking images and associations. We are carried back to Palmyra, a city the history of which is unknown, rising in the desert, shown to the world but for a single age, in the height of its almost unparalleled splendor, and then becoming the spoil of a Roman army and its savage leader, who laid waste in a few days what was never to be restored. After this, a cloud of obscurity settled over it, and its ancient glories were almost regarded as fabulous ; till, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, a few English merchants, from the factory at Aleppo, found their way to its wonderful ruins, and brought back a tale, for which they scarcely obtained credit, — which indeed caused their veracity to be questioned. Zenobia, the queen of this city, has been a name for poetry and painting, and history represents her as a woman of extraordinary intellect and beauty, united with great strength of character ; an Asiatic princess, with Grecian refinement and Roman hardihood. Her principal minister, who is very happily introduced in the present work, was the philosopher, Longinus. Her victor, Aurelian, was the son of a Pannonian peasant, originally an adventurer, a common soldier ; who, by his courage, ferocity, bodily strength, power of control, and skill in war, had raised himself to be the military despot of the Roman Empire, and kept himself at its head, almost five years, before his turn for assassination came. With perhaps occasional outbreaks of something like a generous impulse, he was on the whole only less hateful than some of his predecessors, because he did not, like them, mix up his atrocious cruelties with the utter vileness of the most loathsome sensuality.

The complete ruin of Palmyra followed its destruction by Aurelian. As regards that city, he might have rivalled the boast of Attila, that *the grass grew not where his horse's hoofs had trod*. Lying as an oasis in the desert, between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean, and favored with an abundant supply of water, it rose rapidly to wealth and civilization, as an emporium of the commerce of the East. Its Grecian name, Palmyra, and its Eastern name, Tadmor, were equally expressive of the great number of palm-trees which flourished around it. In the middle of the last century, there was but

one remaining ; the sands of the desert had encroached to its walls, and only a few Arab huts were to be found among its ruins.

At that time (in 1751), it was visited by the travellers Dawkins and Wood, to whom we are indebted for our principal information respecting its present state. Their published drawings and measurements are satisfactory ; but are accompanied with only a very brief narrative. After a journey of six days from Aleppo, through the desert, the travellers arrived about noon in view of "Tadmor's marble wastes." "The hills opening," says Mr. Wood, "discovered to us all at once the greatest quantity of ruins we had ever seen, all of white marble ; and beyond them, toward the Euphrates, a flat waste, as far as the eye could reach, without any object, which showed either life or motion. It is scarcely possible to imagine any thing more striking than this view." The remains of the city lay within a circuit of about three miles, which appeared as if it had been filled with public edifices. The whole ground was covered with heaps of marble ; yet among them the ruins of vast buildings were still conspicuous, "the greatest and most entire," says Wood, which the travellers had seen. Among these two were preëminent ; — one of them, the Temple of the Sun, standing in a court, more than seven hundred feet square, which was enclosed by a wall ; adorned on the outside with pilasters, and originally with a double row of interior columns, forming as it were cloisters ; the temple itself being in the midst of the area, surrounded by columns fifty feet high ; — the other, an open portico, stretching three quarters of a mile in length, many of the pillars of which are yet standing. All the edifices, of which any considerable ruins are extant, are supposed to have been erected during the period of less than three centuries which intervened between the Christian era and the destruction of the city. The style of architecture is almost throughout Corinthian ; but the vastness of the buildings has an Egyptian character.

It was this city which Piso, the supposed author of the Letters, is imagined to have seen in its glory ; and to have given his first impressions from its view, in the following passage. We quote a few lines, preceding, descriptive of the desert surrounding this cultivated spot.

"Upon this boundless desert we now soon entered. The scene which it presented was more dismal than I can describe.

A red, moving sand,— or hard and baked by the heat of a sun, such as Rome never knows,— low, gray rocks just rising here and there above the level of the plain, with now and then the dead and glittering trunk of a vast cedar, whose roots seemed as if they had outlasted centuries,— the bones of camels and elephants, scattered on either hand, dazzling the sight by reason of their excessive whiteness,— at a distance occasionally an Arab of the desert, for a moment surveying our long line, and then darting off to his fastnesses,— these were the objects which, with scarce any variation, met our eyes during the four wearisome days that we dragged ourselves over this wild and inhospitable region."

* * * * *

"I was still buried in reflection, when I was aroused by the shout of those who led the caravan, and who had attained the summit of a little rising ground, saying, 'Palmyra! Palmyra!' I urged forward my steed, and in a moment the most wonderful prospect I ever beheld,— no, I cannot except even Rome,— burst upon my sight. Flanked by hills of considerable elevation on the East, the city filled the whole plain below as far as the eye could reach, both toward the North and toward the South. This immense plain was all one vast and boundless city. It seemed to me to be larger than Rome. Yet I knew very well that it could not be,— that it was not. And it was some time before I understood the true character of the scene before me, so as to separate the city from the country, and the country from the city, which here wonderfully interpenetrate each other, and so confound and deceive the observer. For the city proper is so studded with groups of lofty palm-trees, shooting up among its temples and palaces, and on the other hand, the plain in its immediate vicinity is so thickly adorned with magnificent structures of the purest marble, that it is not easy, nay it is impossible at the distance at which I contemplated the whole, to distinguish the line which divided the one from the other. It was all city and all country, all country and all city. Those which lay before me I was ready to believe were the Elysian Fields. I imagined that I saw under my feet the dwellings of purified men and of gods. Certainly they were too glorious for the mere earth-born. There was a central point, however, which chiefly fixed my attention, where the vast Temple of the Sun, stretched upward its thousand columns of polished marble to the heavens, in its matchless beauty casting into the shade every other work of art of which the world can boast. I have stood before the Parthenon, and have almost worshipped that divine achievement of the immortal Phidias. But it is a toy by the side of this bright crown of the Eastern

capital. I have been at Milan, at Ephesus, at Alexandria, at Antioch; but in neither of those renowned cities have I beheld any thing that I can allow to approach in united extent, grandeur, and most consummate beauty, this almost more than work of man. On each side of this, the central point, there rose upward slender pyramids, — pointed obelisks, — domes of the most graceful proportions, columns, arches, and lofty towers, for number and for form; beyond my power to describe. These buildings, as well as the walls of the city, being all either of white marble, or of some stone as white, and being everywhere in their whole extent interspersed, as I have already said, with multitudes of overshadowing palm-trees, perfectly filled and satisfied my sense of beauty, and made me feel for the moment, as if in such a scene I should love to dwell, and there end my days." — Vol. i. pp. 20, 21 — 23.

This passage will not excite too high expectations respecting the work, which is written throughout in a natural, agreeable, well-sustained style, though with a few negligences, here and there, which a slight revision might remove, and, also, as it seemed to us, a few repetitions of the same essential idea or conception. The magnificent architecture of Palmyra, the Temple of the Sun, and the Long Portico are finely brought into view in other parts of the work. In general, whatever is intended to be conformed to history and fact is represented correctly; and it may therefore be worth while to mention the error, in the passage quoted, of placing the hills near Palmyra, on the east, instead of the west; where it appears they stand from the account of Wood. While upon this head, we may as well notice another error of little more importance, but connected with a fact of some curiosity. Piso, in one of his letters, (Vol. i. p. 56,) says; — " Returning, we passed through the arches of a vast aqueduct, which pours into the city a river of the purest water. This is the most striking object, and noblest work of art, without the walls." So a Roman aqueduct might have been spoken of. But there was, at Palmyra, no aqueduct constructed upon arches. It is a remarkable fact, that its principal supply of water was through an aqueduct *built under ground*, which has been broken, says Wood, about half a league from the city. He gives a plan of it, by which its interior appears to have been about four feet in width, by eight feet in depth. This subterranean construction is, as far as we know, unique among ancient watercourses. That the Romans were acquainted with the fact, that water when confined will rise to the height of its source, seems now

to be the prevalent opinion. But the passage of Pliny which has been principally relied upon is a little suspicious. He says ; “ Water confined in lead rises to the height of its source;”—*Aqua in plumbo subit altitudinem exortus sui*. If he were acquainted with the general law of fluids, of which this is an example, why did he not express it in general terms, instead of stating a particular fact. We are reminded of what Horace says of the water, that “ strives to burst its case of lead,” *tendit rumpere plumbum*, when speaking of that which was conveyed through Rome, in leaden pipes from the reservoirs of the aqueducts. Considering the intellectual habits of the Romans, it would not be strange that a particular phenomenon should be known to them, without any inquiry following by which it might be traced to a general law.

It should be observed, however, that in a subsequent part of the work, there is mention of the ruins of a subterranean aqueduct, through which Zenobia is represented as escaping from the city when it was environed by the Roman army. But this is described as of much larger dimensions than that which actually existed.

We are not about to dwell at length on the characters and incidents of the “ Letters from Palmyra ”; for the work itself is much better worth reading, than such an account as we might give. Zenobia, except that a dazzling haze of romance is thrown round her, appears as she is represented in history. Perhaps we should except also her being drawn as a female warrior, ready to engage personally in battle, as is also her friend Fausta. For ourselves, we could well have spared this trait in the character of either. But our associations with ancient amazons, with the swift-footed Camilla, for instance, are such, that we do not class them with those who make the nearest approach to their bravery in modern times. Generally it may be remarked, that to the higher and more prominent characters, there is ascribed a nobleness and refinement greater, some may think, than the nature of an historical romance requires ; for something of this sort, some idealizing of the personages of history it does require ; as is shown in the works of the great master of the art. No character, perhaps, on the whole is more successfully managed than that of Longinus.

From a charge that has been brought against Zenobia, of having exposed Longinus to the vengeance of Aurelian, in

order to save herself, a charge that appears in most modern accounts of her, and seems to have gained general credit, she is, we think, successfully vindicated by the author of the Letters, in a note to his second volume. We were led in consequence to look at the narrative of Gibbon. It is characteristic of that historian. He thus writes.

“ When the Syrian queen was brought into the presence of Aurelian, he sternly asked her, ‘ How she had presumed to rise in arms against the emperors of Rome.’ The answer of Zenobia was a prudent mixture of respect and firmness. ‘ Because I disdained to consider as Roman emperors an Aureolus or a Gallienus. You alone I acknowledge as my conqueror and my sovereign.’ But as female fortitude is commonly artificial, so it is seldom steady or consistent. The courage of Zenobia deserted her in the hour of trial; she trembled at the angry clamors of the soldiers, who called aloud for her immediate execution, forgot the generous despair of Cleopatra, which she had proposed to herself as a model, and ignominiously purchased life by the sacrifice of her fame and her friends. It was to their counsels, which governed the weakness of her sex, that she imputed the guilt of her obstinate resistance; it was on their heads that she directed the vengeance of the cruel Aurelian. The fame of Longinus, who was included among the numerous and perhaps innocent victims of her fear, will survive that of the queen who betrayed, or the tyrant who condemned him. Genius and learning were incapable of moving a fierce unlettered soldier, but they had served to elevate and harmonize the soul of Longinus. Without uttering a complaint, he calmly followed the executioner, pitying his unhappy mistress, and bestowing comfort on his afflicted friends.”

For the answer with which Gibbon furnishes Zenobia, his only authority is the following passage from Trebellius Pollio. “ When, upon her being taken captive by Aurelian, and brought into his presence, he thus addressed her; ‘ Why, Zenobia, have you dared to insult Roman emperors?’ she is reported to have said; ‘ I acknowledge you as an emperor for you are a conqueror. I did not regard Gallienus, Aureolus, and the others as princes. Thinking Victoria like myself, I wished to share the empire with her, could we be brought into neighbourhood.’ ”* This is not very like the prudent mixture of respect and firmness ascribed to her by the

* Hist. August., ed. Schrevelii, page 791.

modern historian. Nor is it probable that even this answer, which is mentioned by Trebellius only as report, was really made by Zenobia. Victoria or Victorina was the mother of Victorinus, who, amid a rapid succession of assassinations and changes, obtained the command of the army in Gaul, and she appears to have shared in his short-lived power. But her name has almost disappeared from history ; and if Zenobia had ever heard it, she would not probably have considered her as rivalling herself. The remark of Gibbon, respecting female fortitude, is like a large proportion of those appearing throughout his work in the form of apothegms, which, whether true or false, are trivialities disguised by the formal style of their annunciation. In endurance, woman has shown herself not inferior to man. That Zenobia had proposed the generous despair of Cleopatra for her model, is only an embellishment. For the narrative of the death of Longinus, we follow the author of the Letters in quoting the passage on which it rests, from Zosimus, who wrote more than a century after the destruction of Palmyra.

“Aurelian, returning to Emesa, sat in judgment upon Zenobia and those who had been connected with her. Then she related the causes of the war, exculpating herself, and bringing forward many others as leading her on, she being only a woman. Among them was Longinus, of whom there are writings extant, which afford great profit to such as are desirous of instruction, who, being convicted of the charges brought against him, was immediately condemned to death by the king. This he bore so nobly as to comfort those who compassionated his misfortune.”

Such is the story which Gibbon has dressed in modern costume. To the consultation of it in the note before referred to, it may be added, that Zosimus was so ill-informed respecting Zenobia, and so careless of obtaining correct information, that in regard to her death he only gives a report, that, as Aurelian was carrying her with him to Rome, she died either through disease or voluntary hunger ; * though two contemporary historians (Trebellius Pollio and Vopiscus) speak of her as having been led in triumph by the emperor. Zosimus, as if to despatch the whole business at once, proceeds with the same report, as stating that all those who shared in her rebellion, except her son, were drowned in the Hellespont. He

* Lib. I. c. 59.

had before related, that some of them, at least, were put to death with Longinus. Trebellius Pollio, who could not have written more than about thirty years after the destruction of Palmyra, says, that the descendants of Zenobia were remaining among the nobility of Rome ; and that it was reported that she lived with her children like a Roman matron ; "Aurelian," he says, "having given her an estate at Tibur (Tivoli) still called by her name, not far from the palace of Adrian."*

We have quoted from the Letters a passage which shows Palmyra at the height of its prosperity. We will contrast it with another which describes its sack and ruin. Piso is supposed to have retired from the city with the family of a noble Roman, resident in Palmyra, Gracchus, the father of Fausta, shortly before the event, and to be viewing the scene from one of the neighbouring heights.

"After one day of preparation and one of assault, the city has fallen, and Aurelian again entered in triumph. This time in the spirit of revenge and retaliation. It is evident, as we look on, horror-struck, that no quarter is given, but that a general massacre has been ordered, both of soldier and citizen. We can behold whole herds of the defenceless populace escaping from the gates or over the walls, only to be pursued, — hunted, — and slaughtered by the remorseless soldiers. And thousands upon thousands have we seen driven over the walls, or hurled from the battlements of the lofty towers to perish, dashed upon the rocks below."

* * * * *

"No sooner had the evening of this fatal day set in, than a new scene of terrific sublimity opened before us, as we beheld flames beginning to ascend from every part of the city. They grew and spread, till they presently appeared to wrap all objects alike in one vast sheet of fire. Towers, pinnacles, and domes, after glittering awhile in the fierce blaze, one after another fell and disappeared in the general ruin. The Temple of the Sun stood long untouched, shining almost with the brightness of the sun itself, its polished shafts and sides reflecting the surrounding fire with an intense brilliancy. We hoped that it might escape, and were certain that it would, unless fired from within, — as, from its insulated position, the flames from the neighbouring buildings could not reach it. But we watched not long ere from its western extremity the fire broke forth, and warned us that that peerless monument of human genius, like all else, would soon

crumble to the ground. To our amazement, however, and joy, the flames, after having made great progress, were suddenly arrested, and by some cause extinguished, — and the vast pile stood towering in the centre of the desolation, of double size, as it seemed, from the fall and disappearance of so many of the surrounding structures.”

* * * * *

“ On the third day after the capture of the city and the massacre of the inhabitants, the army of the ‘conqueror and destroyer’ withdrew from the scene of its glory, and again disappeared beyond the desert. I sought not the presence of Aurelian while before the city, for I cared not to meet him drenched in the blood of women and children. But as soon as he and his legions were departed, we turned toward the city, as children to visit the dead body of a parent.

“ No language which I can use, my Curtius, can give you any just conception of the horrors which met our view on the way to the walls and in the city itself. For more than a mile before we reached the gates, the roads, and the fields on either hand, were strewed with the bodies of those who, in their attempts to escape, had been overtaken by the enemy and slain. Many a group of bodies did we notice, evidently those of a family, the parents and the children, who, hoping to reach in company some place of security, had all, — and without resistance, apparently, — fallen a sacrifice to the relentless fury of their pursuers. Immediately in the vicinity of the walls, and under them, the earth was concealed from the eye by the multitudes of the slain, and all objects were stained with the one hue of blood. Upon passing the gates and entering within those walls which I had been accustomed to regard as embracing in their wide and graceful sweep, the most beautiful city of the world, my eye met nought but black and smoking ruins, fallen houses and temples, the streets choked with piles of still blazing timbers and the half-burned bodies of the dead. As I penetrated farther into the heart of the city, and to its better-built and more spacious quarters, I found the destruction to be less, — that the principal streets were standing, and many of the more distinguished structures. But everywhere, — in the streets, — upon the porticos of private and public dwellings, — upon the steps and within the very walls of the temples of every faith, — in all places, the most sacred as well as the most common, lay the mangled carcasses of the wretched inhabitants. None, apparently, had been spared. The aged were there, with their bald or silvered heads, — little children and infants, — women, the young, the beautiful, the good, — all were there slaughtered in every imaginable way, and presenting to the eye

spectacles of horror and of grief enough to break the heart and craze the brain. For one could not but go back to the day and the hour when they died, and suffer with these innocent thousands a part of what they suffered, when, the gates of the city giving way, the infuriated soldiery poured in, and with death written in their faces and clamoring on their tongues, their quiet houses were invaded, and, resisting or unresisting, they all fell together, beneath the murderous knives of the savage foe. What shrieks then rent and filled the air, — what prayers of agony went up to the gods for life to those whose ears on mercy's side were adders', — what piercing supplications that life might be taken and honor spared. The apartments of the rich and the noble presented the most harrowing spectacles, where the inmates, delicately nurtured and knowing of danger, evil, and wrong only by name and report, had first endured all that nature most abhors, and then there, where their souls had died, were slain by their brutal violators with every circumstance of most demoniac cruelty. Happy for those who, like Gracchus, foresaw the tempest and fled. These calamities have fallen chiefly upon the adherents of Antiochus; but among them, alas! were some of the noblest and most honored families of the capital. Their bodies now lie blackened and bloated upon their door-stones, — their own halls have become their tombs." — Vol. II. pp. 229 — 233.

To understand what follows, it must be told that Piso had half become a Christian.

" The silence of death and of ruin rests over this once and but so lately populous city. As I stood upon a high point which overlooked a large extent of it, I could discern no signs of life, except here and there a detachment of the Roman guard dragging forth the bodies of the slaughtered citizens, and bearing them to be burned or buried. This whole people is extinct. In a single day these hundred thousands have found a common grave. Not one remains to bewail or bury the dead. Where are the anxious crowds, who, when their dwellings have been burned, eagerly rush in as the flames have spent themselves, to sorrow over their smoking altars, and pry with busy search among the hot ashes, as if perchance they may yet rescue some lamented treasure, or bear away, at least, the bones of a parent or child, buried beneath the ruins? They are not here. It is broad day, and the sun shines bright, but not a living form is seen lingering about these desolated streets and squares. Birds of prey are already hovering round, and alighting without apprehension of disturbance wherever the banquet invites them; and soon as the shadows of evening shall fall, the hyena of the desert will be here to gorge himself upon what they have left, having scented

afar off upon the tainted breeze the fumes of the rich feast here spread for him. These Roman grave-diggers from the Legion of Bassus, are alone upon the ground to contend with them for their prize. O, miserable condition of humanity ! Why is it that to man have been given passions, which he cannot tame, and which sink him below the brute ! Why is it that a few ambitious are permitted by the Great Ruler, in the selfish pursuit of their own aggrandizement, to scatter in ruin, desolation, and death, whole kingdoms, — making misery and destruction the steps by which they mount up to their seats of pride ! O, gentle doctrine of Christ !—doctrine of love and of peace, when shall it be that I and all mankind shall know thy truth, and the world smile with a new happiness under thy life-giving reign ! ”— Vol. II. pp. 234, 235.

This is very powerful description, but not exaggerated. It only presents to our imagination, mingled with expressions of human feeling, the detail of events, that Aurelian himself sums up in a few lines of a letter, * in which no touch of remorse betrays that the writer belonged to our race. “ Aurelian Augustus to Ceionius Bassus. Palmyrenes enough have been slain and cut to pieces. We have not spared the women ; we have killed the infants ; we have slaughtered the old men ; we have destroyed the peasants. To whom shall we leave the country or city ? Those who remain must be spared. For we trust that so few will be corrected by the punishment of so many.” And he then passes on, with the same coolness, to speak of repairing the Temple of the Sun. Vopiscus, who reckons Aurelian among the few excellent emperors from Augustus to Constantius Chlorus, describes this letter as “ exhibiting an acknowledgment of the most savage fury ;” *confessionem immanissimi furoris ostentans*. Gibbon speaks of it with more calmness, and only on a later occasion makes some philosophical remarks upon the character of Aurelian ; “ He was naturally of a severe disposition. A peasant and a soldier, his nerves yielded not easily to the impression of sympathy ; and he could sustain without emotion the sight of tortures and death. Trained from his earliest youth in the exercise of arms, he set too small a value on the life of a citizen.” The historian adds, that “ His love of justice often became a blind and furious passion.” If so, it was a remarkable transformation.

One characteristic of the “ Letters from Palmyra,” from

* Preserved by Vopiscus. Hist. August., page 866.

which they derive much of their interest, consists in the just views they afford of the condition of mankind during the period to which they relate. Facts are brought distinctly before us, so as to produce a right impression of the age ; — the merciless and rapacious character of its continual wars, the widely-spread miseries of private slavery, the absence of a true standard of right, and the religious darkness of the pagan world. Nor are these painful features made too prominent ; a benevolent and cheerful tone of feeling pervades the work ; the picture is brightened by the conception of the holiday joyousness of Palmyra, by the amiable or generous traits of character ascribed to most of the principal personages, and especially by the light of Christianity, which appears as having risen above the horizon. Ancient history has often been so written in modern times that the reader, unless he be more than commonly attentive and thoughtful, will gain no correct notion of its proper subject, of the men of former times of whom it proposes to give an account. He will learn little more than names, events, and dates. He will have little idea of the real state of civilization, of the forms of society, of the modes of life, the feelings, occupations, and enjoyments of the generality of men, of the passions, vices, impulses, and principles by which they were governed, of the point to which intellectual culture had attained, and of the extent of its diffusion, or consequently, of the aspect under which human nature presented itself, so widely different from what it has assumed in modern times. The historian wants a philosophical comprehension of what he is relating. The facts of the age of which he treats are insulated in his mind, not grouped together so as to form a consistent and striking picture, not seen in their relations, not viewed comparatively with those of other periods and different states of our race. He has not imagination to discern the details necessarily involved in general statements ; nor penetration, knowledge of human nature, and moral sensibility to appreciate as he ought the particulars which he brings together. He cannot withdraw himself from the circle of the age in which he lives. His modern associations cling round the events and characters of antiquity, and hide their real features. He limits his views to prominent individuals, concerning whom our information is often so uncertain, and overlooks the actual character and state of the mass of men, which, for the most part, there are documents enough to illustrate. As

shown by him, a veil lies over it, beneath which only the common outline of humanity is to be seen.

In regard to Greece, the excellent history of Mitford is of another character. But of the Roman empire we have no truly instructive account, except so far as the late work of Sismondi supplies the deficiency. In the history of Gibbon we doubt whether there are more errors arising merely from want of information or want of care, than might reasonably be expected in so voluminous a work, embracing such a variety of topics. It is the compilation of an industrious scholar. But in treating of the history of Christianity, especially in his earlier volumes, his suppressions of the truth, the very disproportioned prominence which he gives to particular facts, his quotations of single passages without the explanation which would change their aspect, his insinuations of what is false without the direct expression of it, his language hovering on the bounds of the ironical and the serious, so that it may be understood in the former sense, and defended in the latter, and his sneering and injurious tone, the result of utter incapacity to feel or estimate the moral interest of the subject, produce the effect of the grossest misrepresentation. In the other portions of his history, there is the want of a thinking and reasoning spirit to vivify the mass of facts. To the title of philosopher, which he particularly affected, he has no claim. He has given the detail of events, during a long period, with occasional striking expressions, and strokes of wit, but he has not given its history. He has not connected those events with their essential causes ; nor viewed them as characteristic of the condition of man. His work presents a series of changes seemingly accidental ; for the reasons are not made apparent, why the course of things might not have been very different from what it was, the same general state of society existing. His moral temperament, likewise, was as defective as his philosophical. It is not merely that he was an infidel, of the French school of Voltaire, nor that a trait of indecency which he could introduce in a note or insinuate in the text, was a lure that easily drew him aside from the serious and honorable purposes of history ; but we feel throughout his history the absence of a just estimate of men and things, an absence of moral discrimination and sentiment. Though without an extraordinary number of mistakes arising from mere want of scholarship, his work is a *misrepresentation* throughout. Every thing is modernized

and discolored. From a superficial reading of it, one may scarcely derive notions of the period of which it treats, more correct than what he would have of the ancient Greeks and Romans, if he imagined that the historical pictures of the French painter, David, actually represented the scenes which are their subject. His work is like an exhibition on the ancient stage. The painted mask, the buskin, the stiffened and heavy folds of the drapery conceal all characteristic lineaments and expression. His style moves on with its formal and pompous march, whatever is to be told. If we may use such a figure, instead of the faint flourish of trumpets at doubtful victories, the clamor of abandoned revelry, the wild sounds of barbaric music, and, blending with all, the continual wail of desolation, we hear only the constant monotonous playing of an organ with a small compass of notes.

When the veil or the pall is lifted from the age to which the "Letters from Palmyra" relate, we behold the Roman world overspread with armies. Everywhere are war, seditions, massacres, slavery, and cruelty. The Roman armies, formed, like the Free Companions or the troops of the *Condottieri*, of mercenaries of different nations, and resembling them in rapacity and savageness, were the true rulers of the empire. The emperors were those whom they chose for a time to acknowledge as their masters; either military leaders, like Aurelian, whose fierce and hardy qualities commanded their admiration, and gave them promise of success in war; or worthless profligates, like Gallienus, who, by unbounded largesses and bribes, purchased from them the privilege of indulging in the most detestable excesses. Among the nobles and the rich, there was generally that reckless and shameless abandonment to vice, that sole care for safety and selfish gratifications, which can result only from the absence of all sense of morals in a community where life and fortune are constantly at hazard. "Amavit propinquos, res nostris temporibus comparanda miraculo;" — "He loved his friends," says the contemporary historian, Trebellius, "a thing in our age to be compared to a prodigy."

But amid this state of things, which seemed to threaten the dissolution of civil society, a new element had been and was still working. Christianity had been introduced; and there cannot be a contrast more striking than what appeared during the first three centuries of our era, between the pagan

world and the new brotherhood of Christians. In becoming acquainted with the true history of the Christians of this period, we become conversant with men, who, whatever might be their mistakes or failings, or the vices of some of their number, present a wholly different character from that of the multitudes around them. We discern the high qualities and powers of our nature unfolding. A history that should fairly represent the age, a history, in consequence, unlike that of Gibbon in almost every feature, would constitute one of the most powerful arguments for the divine origin of our religion ; for it would show the impossibility of its having had its source in those causes, which had been and were operating upon the condition of men everywhere, without the sphere of its influence.

We have been led into these remarks, because in the volumes before us the contrast between Christianity and paganism is beautifully exhibited. Though never obtrusively brought forward, it runs through the work and constitutes one of its principal charms. Of this no quotations which our limits admit would afford a fair specimen ; and we shall give but a single extract from a very interesting conversation. In the course of the story we are introduced to an individual in extreme old age, a hermit, who, having been a preacher of our religion, had now, that his strength failed him, retired from the world to die. He is visited by Piso, who writes the account, in company with Fausta and with Julia, the daughter of Zenobia. The old man is speaking.

“ ‘Till age dried up the sources of my strength, I toiled night and day in all countries and climates, in the face of every danger, in the service of mankind. For it is by serving others, that the law of Christ is fulfilled. This disinterested labor for others constituted the greatness of Jesus Christ. This constitutes true greatness in his followers. I perceive that what I say falls upon your ear as a new and strange doctrine. But it is the doctrine of Christianity. It utterly condemns, therefore, a life of solitary devotion. It is a mischievous influence which is now spreading outward from the example of that Paul, who suffered so much under the persecution of the Emperor Decius, and who then, flying to the solitudes of the Egyptian Thebais, has there in the vigor of his days buried himself in a cave of the earth, that he may serve God by forsaking man. His maxim seems to be, “The farther from man, the nearer to God,” — the reverse of the Christian maxim, “The nearer man, the nearer God.” A disciple of Jesus has truly said ; “He who loves not his brother

whom he hath seen, how shall he love God, whom he hath not seen?" This, it may be, Roman, is the first sentence you have ever heard from the Christian books.'

" 'I am obliged to confess that it is,' I replied. 'I have heretofore lived in an easy indifference toward all religions. The popular religion of my country I early learned to despise. I have perused the philosophers, and examined their systems, from Pythagoras to Seneca, and am now, what I have long been, a disciple of none but Pyrrho. My researches have taught me only how the more ingeniously to doubt. Wearied at length with a vain inquiry after truth that should satisfy and fill me, I suddenly abandoned the pursuit, with the resolve never to resume it. I was not even tempted to depart from this resolution when Christianity offered itself to my notice; for I confounded it with Judaism, and for that, as a Roman, I entertained too profound a contempt to bestow upon it a single thought. I must acknowledge that the reports which I heard, and which I sometimes read, of the marvellous constancy and serenity of the Christians, under accumulated sufferings and wrongs, interested my feelings in their behalf; and the thought often arose, "Must there not be truth to support such heroism?" But the world went on its way, and I with it, and the Christians were forgotten. To a Christian, on my voyage across the Mediterranean, I owe much, for my first knowledge of Christianity. To the Princess Julia I owe a larger debt still. And now from your lips, long accustomed to declare its truths, I have heard what makes me truly desirous to hear the whole of that, which, in the little glimpses I have been able to obtain, has afforded so real a satisfaction.'

" 'If you studied the Christian books,' said the recluse, 'you would be chiefly struck, perhaps, with the plainness and simplicity of the doctrines there unfolded. You would say that much which you found there, relating to the right conduct of life, you had already found scattered through the books of the Greek and Roman moralists. You would be startled by no strange or appalling truth. You would turn over their leaves in vain in search of such dark and puzzling ingenuities as try the wits of those who resort to the pages of the *Timaeus*. A child can understand the essential truths of Christ. And the value of Christianity consists not in this, that it puts forth a new, ingenious, and intricate system of philosophy, but that it adds to recognised and familiar truths divine authority. Some things are indeed new; and much is new, if that may be called so, which, having been neglected as insignificant by other teachers, has by Christ been singled out and announced as primal and essential. But the peculiarity of Christianity lies in this, that its voice, whether heard in republishing

an old and familiar doctrine, or announcing a new one, is not the voice of man, but of God. It is a revelation. It is a word from the invisible, unapproachable Spirit of the universe. For this Socrates would have been willing to renounce all his wisdom. Is it not this which we need? We can theorize and conjecture without end, but cannot relieve ourselves of our doubts. They will assail every work of man. We wish to repose in a divine assurance. This we have in Christianity. It is a message from God. It puts an end to doubt and conjecture. Wise men of all ages have agreed in the belief of One God; but not being able to demonstrate his being and his unity, they have had no power to change the popular belief, which has ever tended to polytheism and idolatry. Christianity teaches this truth with the authority of God himself, and already has it become the faith of millions. Philosophers have long ago taught that the only safe and happy life is a virtuous life. Christianity repeats this great truth, and adds, that it is such a life alone that conducts to immortality. Philosophers have themselves believed in the doctrine of a future life, and have died hoping to live again; and it cannot be denied that mankind generally have entertained an obscure expectation of a renewed existence after death. The advantage of Christianity consists in this, that it assures us of the reality of a future existence, on the word and authority of God himself. Jesus Christ taught, that all men come forth from death, wearing a new spiritual body, and thereafter never die; and to confirm his teaching, he himself being slain, rose from the dead, and showed himself to his followers alive, and while they were yet looking upon him, ascended to some other and higher world. Surely, Roman, though Christianity announced nothing more than these great truths, yet seeing it puts them forth in the name, and with the authority of God, it is a vast accession to our knowledge.''

— Vol. i. pp. 163 – 166.

Our general estimate of the "Letters from Palmyra," appears in what we have already said. It is not a work of an ordinary character. It is the production of a thoughtful, able, imaginative, and above all, a pure and right-minded author, of clear thoughts and sound sense.
